



The Social Semiotic Study of Performance in a Classical Hollywood Film

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	II
Table of Contents	II
Abstract	VIII
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Objectives	1
1.3 Research Rationale	2
1.3.1 The Social Semiotic Approach	2
1.3.2 Roman Holiday	3
1.3.3 The Story of Roman Holiday	4
1.3.4 The Choice of Scenes for in Depth Analysis	4
1.4 Methodology Overview	5
1.5 Research Significance	6
1.6 Key Terms	7
1.6.1 Features of Classical Hollywood Cinema and Narrative Conventions.....	8
1.6.2 The Difference of Film, Cinema and Movie	9
1.6.3 The Difference between Acting and Performance.....	9
1.6.4 Hollywood Cast and Crew at Different Film Production Stages	14
1.6.5 Hollywood Film Acting versus Daily Communication	14
1.6.6 Rhythm.....	16
1.6.7 Actors' Gestural Communication	18
1.7 Overview of the Thesis Structure.....	23
1.8 Summary	23
2.1 Introduction	24
2.2 Performance	24
2.2.1 Theatre Acting	25
2.2.2 Film Acting	29
2.2.3 Art Direction, Cinematography and Editing.....	37
2.3 Semiotics	39
2.3.1 Semiotic Traditions	39
2.3.2 Semiotics and Film	42
2.3.3 Social Semiotics.....	46

2.3.4 Social Semiotics and Film.....	48
2.3.5 Social Semiotic Film Acting Study Parameters.....	52
2.4 <i>Roman Holiday</i>	62
2.4.1 ‘Behind the Screen’	62
2.4.2 William Wyler’s Film Making Style	64
2.5 Conclusion	65
2.5.1 The Limitation of Current Research	65
2.5.2 The Applicable Theories.....	66
3.1 Introduction.....	68
3.2 The Methods for Segmentation.....	68
3.2.1 The Reason for Segmentation.....	68
3.2.2 Fields’s Screenplay Structure.....	69
3.2.3 Labov and Waletzky’s Narrative Structure.....	71
3.2.4 Stanislavski’s Script Segmentation.....	73
3.2.5 Van Leeuwen’s Rhythm Segmentation.....	76
3.2.6 The Segmentation of Three Selected Scenes	78
3.3 Methods of Transcription.....	79
3.3.1 Review of Video Transcription Methods.....	80
3.3.2 How Selected Scenes Will Be Transcribed?	88
3.4 Performance Analysis Methods	94
3.4.1 The Analytical Parameters of Acting.....	94
3.4.2 The Analytical Parameters of Art Direction, Cinematography and Editing	95
3.4.3 Gregory’s Phasal Analysis.....	97
3.4.4 Van Leeuwen’s Genre Analysis.....	99
3.4.5 Tentative Analysis	102
3.5 Conclusion	105
4.1 Introduction.....	108
4.2 Performance Segmentation	109
4.2.1 Event.....	109
4.2.2 Fact.....	111
4.2.3 Task.....	112
4.2.4 Action.....	114
4.3 Performance Analysis	117

4.3.1 Acting.....	117
4.3.2 Art Direction	155
4.3.3 Cinematography and Editing	158
4.3.4 Performance and Genre.....	161
4.4 Conclusion	163
5.1 Introduction	166
5.2 Performance Segmentation	167
5.2.1 Event	167
5.2.2 Fact.....	168
5.2.3 Task.....	169
5.2.4 Action.....	171
5.3 Performance Analysis	174
5.3.1 Acting.....	174
5.3.2 Art Direction	204
5.3.3 Cinematography and Editing	206
5.3.4 Performance and Genre.....	211
5.4 Conclusion	213
6.1 Introduction	217
6.2 Performance Segmentation	218
6.2.1 Fact.....	218
6.2.2 Task.....	219
6.2.3 Action.....	220
6.3 Performance Analysis	222
6.3.1 Gestural Acting	223
6.3.2 Art Direction	232
6.3.3 Cinematography and Editing	232
6.3.4 Performance and Genre.....	235
6.4 Conclusion	236
6.4.1 Conclusion of the Gesture-based Scene.....	236
6.4.2 Overall Conclusion	238
7.1 Introduction	241
7.2 Methodological Contributions	242
7.2.1 Contributions of the Segmentation Method	242

7.2.2 Contributions of the Transcription Method	243
7.2.3 Contributions of the Analytical Method	245
7.3 Main Findings	249
7.3.1 Character Development.....	249
7.3.2 Context of Situation and Performance	251
7.3.3 Star Actor's Personal Image and Act Style.....	252
7.3.4 Meaning Potentials and Actualization	253
7.3.5 Three Metafunctions	255
7.4 Testing the Proposed Film Performance Study Methodology on a Chinese Film..	258
7.4.1 Segmentation Method	259
7.4.2 Transcription Method.....	262
7.4.3 Analytical Method	263
7.5 Research Implications	268
7.5.1 <i>Roman Holiday</i> and <i>Raise the Red Lantern</i>	268
7.5.2 Classical Hollywood Film Development	268
7.5.3 Implications.....	269
7.6 Research Limitations and Recommendations	270
Appendices	271
Appendix 3.1 The Segmentation of Events	271
Appendix 3.2 The Segmentation of Facts	273
Appendix 3.3 Iconic Language	276
Appendix 4.1 Tasks of <i>Concealing</i>	278
Appendix 4.2 The Transcription of <i>Concealing</i>	279
Appendix 5.1 Tasks of <i>Revealing</i>	299
Appendix 5.2 The Transcription of <i>Revealing</i>	300
Appendix 6.1 Tasks of <i>Farewell</i>	327
Appendix 6.2 The Transcription of <i>Farewell</i>	328
Appendix 7.1 The Transcription of <i>Summer, Raise the Red Lantern</i>	334
References	340

List of Figures

Figure1. 1 Film performance analytical foci.....	6
Figure1. 2 Film performance and its subdivisions.....	14
Figure1. 3 Non-verbal acting and its subdivisions.....	19
Figure2. 1 Saussure's model of the sign.....	39
Figure2. 2 The relations between signs.....	40
Figure2. 3 The syntagma in syntax	40
Figure2. 4 Peirce's semiotic triangle	41
Figure2. 5 Metz's classification of syntagmatic units in cinema.....	44
Figure2. 6 Basic system networks of spatial discourse in film	50
Figure2. 7 The description of English.....	61
Figure3. 1 Field's screenplay structure	70
Figure3. 2 The top-down narrative structure segmentation of <i>Roman Holiday</i>	71
Figure3. 3 The transcriptive items of O'Halloran et al's software	86
Figure3. 4 The tools for segmentation, transcription and analysis.....	107
Figure4. 1 Boundary analysis.....	116
Figure5. 1 Boundary analysis.....	172
Figure5. 2 Social distances	180
Figure6. 1 Boundary analysis.....	222
Figure7. 1 The top-down method	243
Figure7. 2 The bottom-up method	243
Figure7. 3 Characters' interaction forms	247
Figure7. 4 The cline of actualization	254

Abstract

Taking a social semiotic perspective, this thesis aims to develop methods of film segmentation, transcription and analysis which can be applied to the research of feature films, especially classical Hollywood films, through a comprehensive study of three scenes from the 1953 Hollywood film *Roman Holiday* directed by William Wyler.

The thesis combines top-down approaches such as Syd Field's script structure, William Labov and Joshua Waletzky's narrative structure and Konstantin Stanislavski's acting preparation method, and bottom-up approaches, such as Theo van Leeuwen's rhythm segmentation. Taken together, these approaches support a comprehensive method of segmentation and can be applied to selected scenes that differ in their use of verbal and gestural semiotic modes. Three scenes from *Roman Holiday* are transcribed for analytical purposes after being segmented. They are first etically transcribed, using perceivable rhythm cues, and then emically processed, drawing on van Leeuwen's summarised genre analysis and Michael Gregory's phasal analysis. Thereafter, the thesis analyses how acting, art direction (such as props, costumes, and settings), cinematography (such as camera angles, frame sizes) and editing develop characters, relations, situations and genres, and how art direction, cinematography and editing work to support and shape actors' acting by following approaches by Erika Fischer-Lichte, and David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.

The primary method of segmentation and analysis used throughout this thesis is based on Stanislavski's ranked system of performance units – Action, Task, Fact, Event (a unit added by this study), and Episode. The thesis chapters show the ways that actors and the filmmaking team create the boundaries between these performance units and the ways they develop characters and stories with the aid of a range of verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources. In particular, this research focuses on how actors and the filmmaking team within each unit realise phases, generic stages and genres of the development of the story through acting, art direction, cinematography and editing.

Key words: social semiotics, perceivable cue, film segmentation, film transcription, film performance analysis, film performance study hypotheses, *Roman Holiday*